

WHY MEDITATION?

By Bhikkhu Piyananda

People continually seek ways to increase their happiness, inner peace and harmony. According to public opinion happiness is got through wealth, power, social status. Or through the use of a toothpaste, facial cream, or by driving a certain car – at least that is what the advertisements say. They seek solutions to their problems through their family, jobs, partners, friends, etc. They try to change external conditions in their physical, social and political environment this way and then that way, because they believe that when the world finally becomes ‘perfect’, they become happy and peaceful. But they forget that conditions change all the time and unceasingly. Just before the fulfilment of their dreams, things change and the promise of happiness fades away like the morning mist at daybreak. The harder one tries to reach out for happiness, the more it seems

so elusive like a fluttering butterfly which is enticingly near, but impossible to catch.

The catch is that most people adopt the wrong methods to find peace and harmony. They seek them outside themselves into the external world, instead of looking within themselves. Many are beginning to discover the real source of their happiness and troubles: the mind. And to turn their attention to the 'inner man', the mind, meditation is the way.

Today meditation appeals to so many people from all walks of life and amongst various races and religions. Why? Because the mind works regardless of the race or religion a person belongs to. The task of meditation is to understand the nature of the mind and to use it effectively in daily life. The mind is the key to happiness, and also the key to misery. To understand the mind and use it well is a task that transcends racial, cultural and religious barriers. Meditation can indeed be practised by anyone regardless of his religious label.

Benefits of Meditation

Man is so busy seeking various ways to gain pleasure in today's rat-race. What has meditation to offer? The benefits of meditation are as follows:—

- If you are a busy person, meditation can help you to get rid of tension and to find some relaxation.
- If you are a worried person, meditation can help to calm you and help you to find either

permanent or temporary peace.

- If you are a person who has endless problems, meditation can help you to develop courage and strength to face and overcome problems.
- If you lack self-confidence, meditation can help you to gain the self-confidence you need. This self-confidence is the secret of success.
- If you have fear in your heart, meditation can help you to understand the real nature of the objects that are making you afraid – then you can overcome the fear in your mind.
- If you are always dissatisfied with everything – nothing in life seems to be satisfactory – meditation will give you the chance to develop and to maintain some inner satisfaction.
- If you are sceptical and disinterested in religion, meditation can help you to go beyond your own scepticism and to see some practical value in religious guidance.
- If you are frustrated and heart-broken due to lack of understanding of the nature of life and the world, meditation will truly guide you and help you to understand that you are disturbed by unnecessary things.
- If you are a rich man, meditation can help you to realize the nature of your wealth and how to make use of your wealth for your own happiness as well as for others.
- If you are a poor man, meditation can help you

to have some contentment and not to harbour jealousy towards those who have more than you.

- If you are a young man at the cross-roads of your life, and you do not know which way to turn, meditation will help you to understand which is the road for you to travel to reach your proper goal.
- If you are an elderly man who is fed-up with life, meditation will bring you to a deeper understanding of life; this understanding in turn will relieve you from the pains of life and will increase the joy of living.
- If you are hot-tempered, you can develop the strength to overcome this weakness of anger, hatred, and resentment.
- If you are jealous, you can understand the danger of your jealousy.
- If you are a slave to your five senses, you can learn how to become the master of your sense-desires.
- If you are addicted to drinking or to drugs, you can realize how to overcome the dangerous habit which has enslaved you.
- If you are an ignorant person, this meditation will give you a chance to cultivate some knowledge that will be useful and beneficial both to you and to your friends and family.
- If you really practise this meditation, your emotion will have no chance to make you a fool

any more.

- If you are a wise person, this meditation will take you to supreme enlightenment. Then you will see things as they are, and not as they appear to be.
- If you are a weak-minded person, this meditation can strengthen your mind to develop your will-power in order to overcome your weaknesses.

These are some of the practical benefits that come from doing meditation. These benefits are not for sale in any shop or department store. Money cannot buy them. They are yours for the practice of meditation. At the beginning this kind of mindfulness is really one 'mindful' mind watching other 'minds' (which are all within one's own mental continuity of course). One thereby develops the ability to look into the mind and to see where it has gone to.

Preparing for Meditation

Selecting a Place

When you first begin to practise, it is advisable for you to have a quiet place where you can do your exercises. Try to find some place away from the turmoil and bustle of busy life. The place can be a room, a garden, your bedroom - whatever you can find. Once you find a place, stick to it. Do not keep shifting the place of practice.

As your meditation progresses, you can begin to

practise the exercises at the place of your daily work. There is no need to go into constant seclusion. Remember that when you have developed your meditation, anywhere can be a place to meditate.

Selecting A Time

The time is for you to decide. Whatever time you choose, this time should be only for meditation. During this time, you should be determined to forget all other things, daily activities, worries, and the like. Be determined not to let anything in the world interfere with your practice. Also make a firm decision to devote a regular time to the practice every day. Remember that when you have developed your meditation, anytime is the time to meditate. If you reach this stage, then meditation is part of your day-to-day living.

Meditation Teacher

Perhaps you feel you need someone to assist, to guide, and to instruct you. It is not always so easy to find a suitable, qualified meditation master. If you have any friends who meditate, talk to them; they can be your teachers. If you come across any books or articles on meditation, read them; they can be your teachers. If you are able to find a teacher, remember that a teacher is only a friend and a guide. He cannot do the meditating for you. He cannot do the realizing for you. If you can manage to develop your concentration and mindfulness to be strong, clear and constant, then your concentrated

awareness is the teacher; your teacher is within you.

Sitting Posture

For sitting meditation, you might like to sit in the semi or full lotus position; if this posture is difficult, then sit on a straight-backed chair. Rest legs on the ground without straining. Sit comfortably erect without leaning or lying back, or you might fall asleep. Keep the body balanced in an upright position so you can remain steady but not tense or stiff. If the neck and spinal cord are not held straight, you may feel some pain after a few minutes.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is simply concentrated awareness. If you are interested in practising meditation, you must learn how to develop your concentration through *Samatha* or *vipassana* meditation. On the other hand, after learning how to develop your awareness or mindfulness, you can do Vipassana or Insight meditation. If you are interested in making use of the *samatha* meditation in your daily life, then learn to apply concentration in your daily life. If you are interested in making use of this *vipassana* meditation, then learn to apply awareness to your daily life. Living-meditation is simply developing and making use of concentrated awareness in the common experiences and events of your daily life.

Samatha: Concentration Meditation

Samatha is a method of training the mind for those who

like to develop their concentration. *Samatha* meditation is concerned with producing a one-pointed mind.

One-pointedness is a concentrated state in which all the faculties and mental powers are focussed and governed by the will-power and directed towards one point or one object. A one-pointed mind is a concentrated and unified mind. A one-pointed mind is the opposite of a distracted or scattered mind. Ordinarily our mental states are scattered in all directions but if the concentration is fixed on one object, then you begin to know the true nature of that object. The process of concentration gradually modifies the mental states until the whole mental energy converges towards one point.

What is the purpose of developing a one-pointed mind? If you train your mind in this manner, then you will bring calmness and tranquility to the mind and you will be able to gather your attention to one point, so as to stop the mind from frittering away and wasting its useful energy. A calm mind is not an end in itself. Calmness of mind is only a necessary condition to develop Insight. In other words, a calm mind is necessary if you want to have a deep look into yourself and to have a deep understanding of yourself and the world.

Samatha meditation trains the mind to various stages of mental concentration. At very high stages of mental concentration (known as *jhana*) psychic powers can be developed. However such high states of concentration are not necessary or practical for most people who have to live in the hectic pace of modern life.

For most people, the mind is jumping from past to present to future and from place to place. Such people waste an enormous amount of mental energy. If you can train your mind to maintain enough concentration to pay attention to each task from moment to moment, this is more than enough! When you are reading, walking, resting, talking – whatever you do in your daily life, act with a mind that is calm and that is paying attention to each and every action. Learn to focus the mind on each task.

Live Now!

If you want to develop concentration, your first task is to find a suitable object on which you can concentrate your mind. In Buddhist meditation, there are 40 objects (not ways or methods) of meditation that you can use to develop concentration. You need not use all 40 objects, but must select one which is suited to your temperament and mentality. If you have no teacher to select the object of concentration that is suited for you, then you must experiment and make the selection yourself. Here are some guidelines to find yourself a suitable object for your concentration:

- The object must be neutral; if it evokes any strong feelings of lust, hate, etc., then you cannot calm your mind but will only make it restless and agitated.
- The object can be either internal or external: An internal object is inside you. Examples of internal objects are breathing, loving-kindness,

compassion, etc. An external object means an object that is outside of you. Examples of external objects are: an image of the Buddha, a flower, a mountain, a circle of light, a candle flame etc.

- The object must be pleasing and acceptable to the mind; if the mind constantly rejects the object, the concentration will be weak.
- Remember that the object that suits you at one time may not be acceptable to the mind at another time. For example, after an outburst of anger, it is difficult to use loving-kindness as an object of your concentration. At such a time, the emotion of anger itself might serve as a better object of concentration.

Once you have selected the object, your task is simply to keep the mind tied to the object just as you might keep an animal tethered to a stake. The key to concentration exercises is to hold the mind on one object to the exclusion of all other objects. By focussing the mind on the object, the mind slowly becomes calmed and relaxed.

Here are some concentration exercises that you can develop as a formal meditation or as part of your day-to-day activities.

Health exercise: while walking back and forth, hold only these three ideas in the mind: “happy, healthy and strong”. Keep repeating these words over and over;

concentrate the mind on these words until you can feel the words physically in the body.

Thinking exercise: while thinking of a subject, hold the mind to that subject. Keep the focus of the mind only on the subject under consideration. Do not entertain any extraneous or irrelevant ideas.

Daily routine exercises: when you read a book keep both your eyes and your mind on the book.

When you sweep the floor, keep the mind on the sweeping.

When you dictate a letter, keep the mind on the dictation and not the secretary.

Learn to concentrate on what you do from moment to moment. This is living in the present. *Live Now!*

Vipassana: Insight Meditation

Vipassana is an insight into the nature of things; *Vipassana* is seeing things as they are. The path that leads to this insight or realization is awareness or mindfulness. The method to develop mindfulness is based on a famous discourse given by the Buddha. In this discourse, the Buddha explained how to develop and cultivate the mind. The name of this discourse is the *Satipatthana Sutta*. In this Sutta, the Buddha offers four objects of meditation for consideration: body, feelings, thoughts, and mental states. The basis of the *Satipatthana* practice is to use these four objects for the development of concentration, mindfulness, and insight or understanding of yourself and the world around you. *Satipatthana* offers the most

simple, direct, and effective method for training the mind to meet daily tasks and problems and to achieve the highest aim: liberation. *Satipatthana* is safe for all types of characters, and a harmless way to train the mind. You can use this method anywhere at anytime, in a busy office or in the quiet of a peaceful night.

The task is to develop awareness or mindfulness (*sati*). Awareness is a very simple, very common and very familiar state of the mind. In its elementary stage, awareness is paying bare attention to an object. This means you simply observe an object without judging it or thinking about it. Awareness is simply observing or giving close attention without making any judgement or thinking.

The body as an Object of Meditation

The goal of these meditation exercises is to realize the nature of the body and to be non-attached to the body; to be neither attracted nor repelled by the body. Usually most people identify themselves with their bodies. However, at a certain stage of mental purification and insight, you will no longer care to think of yourself as a body; you will no longer be identified with the body. You will begin to see the body as it is.

Exercise 1:

Mindfulness of Breathing (anapanasati)

Having chosen your time and place and having adopted the posture most suitable, you are ready to begin. Breathe

calmly and naturally and while breathing, be fully aware of your breath. Be aware of the act of breathing without identifying yourself with this breathing. Acknowledge this process thus: “Breathing In” “Breathing Out” – If too many ideas or other distractions arise and disturb your concentration, then you might try counting your breath movements: “Breathing in, 1, 2, 3, ...” “Breathing Out, 1, 2, 3, ...” As the concentration increases, drop the counting and acknowledge the breathing. Try to fix your attention on the point on the nostril where the breath makes contact with the body.

Breath may become deep or shallow, slow or quick, following natural tendencies. Keep the body erect and motionless while being mentally alert; be keenly observant and as motionless as possible. As you gain mastery over this exercise the body becomes relaxed and the breathing gentle. You will be very peaceful and undisturbed by events either within the mind or from outside.

While doing this exercise, you should forget daily affairs of all kinds and should not even be conscious of yourself. Only be aware of the breathing process, just mentally noting the inflow and outflow of the breath as it occurs. Early morning is a good time for this exercise.

Exercise 2:

Mindfulness of Walking

The walking practice begins with standing on the spot. The standing posture should be an erect body with heels

together. Keep the eyes straight forward, neither up nor down. Maintain this posture for the whole of the walking practice. Do not follow the movements with the eyes but with mindfulness. While standing, be aware of standing; acknowledge you are standing by saying in the mind, "Standing, standing, standing." Now begin the walking first by placing your attention on the heel of the right foot. Acknowledge the lifting of the right foot by saying in the mind, "Lifting". Push the foot forward and acknowledge mentally, "Going". Lower the foot and set it on the ground, mentally acknowledging. "Here".

The walking exercise consists of three phases: 'lifting', 'going' and 'here'. Acknowledge each phase as you walk mindfully concentrating on the movements of the walking process until you reach the end of your allotted walking space.

You stop with both feet together in the standing position, saying in the mind, "Standing, standing, standing." As you turn around by gyrating on your heel, acknowledge each phase of the turning motion: the turning of the heel of one foot and the lifting and setting down on the ground of the other foot. Acknowledge by saying, "Turning." When the turning is complete, acknowledge the standing posture, "Standing, standing, standing." Then begin to walk again. "Lifting, going, here". This exercise should be done as slowly and as mindfully as possible.

If any feelings, thoughts, sounds, disturbances etc. arise, you must acknowledge them as they come up. If

you hear a sound, say “Hearing, hearing, hearing.” If some thoughts enter your mind, acknowledge by saying, “Thinking, thinking, thinking.” After acknowledging, turn your attention back to walking exercise.

Exercise 3:

Mindfulness of Body in Daily Life

Once you have developed some concentrated awareness with your body as an object of meditation, you must try to clearly understand what you are doing with your body every moment of your working day. While walking, pay attention to the walking movements with as many details as you can observe. Also be aware of yourself when the body sits, stands, reclines. Observe the movements of the body, whether in the act of looking at or looking around, whether bending or stretching, whether dressing, washing, eating, chewing, or answering the calls of nature. The aim is to hold the attention steady on each event while it is actually present, but not to follow this event with imagined states which are not present. The aim is lost if the body does one thing and the mind thinks of something else.

Whenever you have a spare moment during the working day, use your body as an object of concentrated awareness.

Feelings as Objects of Meditation

The task here is to mentally acknowledge each feeling at the moment it arises. You have a lot of work to do if

you want to deal with your feelings. You must understand the various kinds of feelings whether they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. You must understand how they come to be, how they develop after their arising, and how they pass away. Feelings arise whenever there is contact between the senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) and objects outside. Feelings must be acknowledged and understood for what they are.

Exercise 1:

Mindfulness of the Sense Bases

You must be aware of the sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) and the contact they are having with the outside world. You must be aware of the feelings that are arising as a result of this contact. For example: ear is now in contact with sound (e.g. children shouting and laughing) outside your meditation place. Unpleasant feeling arising. Or body now in contact with hard surface (chair you are sitting on). Not pleasant; not unpleasant. Itching sensation arising in the nose; unpleasant feeling; want to scratch. Acknowledge your feelings just as a gate-keeper might keep an eye on the people going in and out of the gate. Use feelings as objects for your concentrated awareness. Then you will understand the nature of your feelings and will be able to exercise better control over them.

Exercise 2:

Mindfulness of feelings in Daily Life

Try to slowly establish some control over your feelings by being moderate in eating, by avoiding too much sleep. Try to see the feelings as they arise in the course of daily life. Here are some examples: while waiting impatiently at the bus stop, observe, “resentment is arising within.” While enjoying food in a restaurant, observe, “Tongue in contact with good taste objects. Greed arising.” When you meet a good friend you have not seen for a long time, observe “Mind in contact with object of friendship. Good, happy feeling arising.”

Mental States as Objects of Meditation

You cannot run away from your mind. By meditation, you can train the mind to keep calm and be free from disturbances either from within or outside. Apply concentrated awareness to the internal confusions and mental conflicts, and observe or pay attention to all the changing states of your mind. When the mind is properly developed, it brings happiness and bliss. If the mind is neglected, it runs you into endless troubles and difficulties. The disciplined mind is strong and effective, while the wavering mind is weak and ineffective. The wise train their minds as thoroughly as horse-trainers train their horses.

Exercise 1:

Watching the Mind

Sit alone and observe the changing conditions of the mind. The task is only a matter of observing the

changing states. Do not fight with the mind, or avoid it, or try to control it. Simply look at the mind, and try to see it as it is. When the mind is in a state of lust, be aware that this is so. Observe when the mind is in a state of hatred or when it is free from hatred. Observe the concentrated mind and the scattered mind. Observe all these changing conditions without identifying yourself with them. The task is to turn your attention away from the world and focus it on itself: the mind observing the mind to discover its own nature. This is hardly an easy task, but it can be done.

Exercise 2:

Watching the Mind in Daily Life

In all kinds of situations, you must observe the working of your mind without identifying with or finding justification for your thoughts, without erecting the screen of prejudice, without expecting reward or satisfaction. While you are at work, sense desire, hatred, jealousy and other unwholesome states are sure to arise and upset the balance of the mind. That is the time you need meditation to check these harmful elements. For examples: acknowledge, "The mind is worried because I missed the bus. The worry is not in the bus; the worry is in the mind." Acknowledge, "Hatred is in the mind because I do not like this food. The hatred is not in the food, it is in the mind. I must carefully observe this hatred in the mind."

Thoughts as Objects of Meditation

In the *Satipatthana Sutta* is found the awareness of the Way of Enlightenment as shown by the Buddha. Here the various aspects of the Dhamma or Teaching – mental objects – are mindfully examined and observed as they arise within. For those who are beginning meditation and are unaware of these aspects of the teaching of the Buddha, the mental objects can be taken as the thoughts and ideas that arise within the mind.

The task here is to be aware of the thoughts that arise and pass away within the mind. You must slowly understand the nature of thoughts. You must understand how to make use of the good thoughts and avoid the danger of the harmful thoughts. Your thoughts need constant watching if the mind is to be purified.

Exercise 1:

Mindfulness of Thoughts

Sit alone and concentrate the mind on the thoughts. Watch the good thoughts and observe how they affect your mental state. Watch the harmful thoughts and observe how they disturb your mental state. Simply observe the thoughts dispassionately and so create the opportunity to go beyond them. The moving beyond all thoughts and knowledge brings peace, harmony, and happiness. Just as you might watch people come and go from your room, watch the thoughts come and go from your mind. By being aware of the thoughts, you can slowly reduce the number of thoughts: every thought reduced adds peace

and strength to your mind. If you fight with the thoughts, you can have a very unpleasant task. Simply observe them. Slowly you will come to understand how to control evil thoughts and to encourage good thoughts.

Exercise 2:

Mindfulness of Mental Objects

In the course of your working day, try to observe your thinking process. Do not identify with this process: simply observe it. Acknowledge, "Now my thinking is wrong; I am trying to cheat this man." Acknowledge, "The mind is thinking so negatively now. Whatever I think of, I think negatively. Why is this?" Acknowledge, "This is a good idea that just appeared in the mind. I must give it to Mr. X to use."

Progress in Meditation

Remember that practising meditation requires patience, persistence, and effort. Lasting progress may take much effort and a long time to achieve. There are no short cuts. No magic formula. The process of meditation requires hard work: it is like swimming against the current.

You might be disappointed if you expect immediate or quick results from your meditation. If you are a busy person with many worldly ambitions, you cannot suddenly and voluntarily quieten your mind to the point of removing all thoughts; you cannot suddenly experience a strong and continuous concentrated awareness.

If you hope to make progress in meditation, you have to set yourself some training rules. Training rules are important to the fitness of an athlete who intends to win a championship. Likewise, training rules are important to the fitness of a meditator who intends to make some lasting progress. In establishing your self-discipline, be like the guitar string that is not too tight and not too slack: do not lose your harmony.

Good mental and physical health are necessary for your progress. You must maintain and generate enough bodily and mental energy. A weak and overtired body or mind is a big hindrance to meditation. You must give your body and mind proper rest, exercise and diet.

How can you judge your true progress in meditation? It is not easy for a person to evaluate his spiritual progress. Do not judge progress by momentary states of euphoria, altered perceptions, unusual states of consciousness, occult powers. Here is a rough rule of thumb for you to measure true progress: if you are experiencing increased states of happiness, peace and tranquility, and if you are experiencing decreased states of sadness, depression, worry, anxiety, then you are making true progress.

Meditation in Daily Life

The state of concentrated awareness can be developed as a formal meditation. Yet this state must slowly be transferred into your daily life. It may take much time, effort and patience but you can apply meditation in your whole life.

If you want to do so, you can always create chances

to develop some form of concentrated awareness in your daily life. In modern life there are so many duties to perform, so many hurried actions, tense moments, and anxious situations which create such a great waste of mental energy. In the midst of life's turmoil, set aside a few minutes each day for quiet meditation to strengthen your mind. This is an asset to your daily work and progress. By examining your thoughts and feelings of others as they arise within your daily routine, you can slowly probe into the inner meaning of things. You can find the strength and peace within.

If you can practise meditation in your daily life, then you are fully alive and living in the present. You are completely aware of what is happening within you and around you. In a restless world, you live in an inner peace and calm. ■